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AUTHOR Hollomon, Charlett A.; Snowden, Michael
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ABSTRACT

In 1995, a study was conducted of the performance of graduates from a large comprehensive university in southern Mississippi to compare outcomes for native university students and students who had transferred from an area community college. The study sample consisted of 710 of the university's Bachelor's degree graduates from 1994-95, of whom 573 were classified as native students (i.e., those who had initially enrolled in and had attended only the university) and 137 as community college transfers. Performance measures used included students' grade point averages (GPAs), American College Testing (ACT) scores, and the department from which students graduated to determine academic majors. The study found that while, at the point of transfer, the community college students had lower ACT scores than native students, there was no statistically significant difference in GPAs at graduation for the two groups. Also, transfer students tended to major in education and health-related fields, as opposed to liberal arts, fine arts, business, and science. A table of results for native and transfer students by university department is appended. (HAA)

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Comparing Performance of Two-Year Community College Students
to Four-Year Native Students

Charlett A. Hollomon and Michael Snowden

Department of Educational Administration and Leadership

University of Southern Mississippi

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were differences in performance of native four-year university students to two-year transfer students. Students who graduated from a comprehensive university were studied. Data from these graduates were obtained and divided into two cohorts, those who transferred from a large community college in the same state and those who began and completed all their undergraduate work at the same university (native students). Each group was analyzed to determine if any differences existed in the students' academic ability as measured by ACT and their academic performance as measured by GPA. Differences were noted in ACT scores but no significant differences were noted in GPA scores. Cross tabs were used to analyze differences in the majors students from the two groups chose. Explanations were suggested.

Comparing Performance of Two Year Community College Students
to Four Year Native Students

The differences between community college transfers and native students at four-year colleges have been studied extensively. Best and Gehring (1993) compared the performance and graduation rates of community college transfers to a major state university in Kentucky. They found insignificant differences in the mean grade point averages (GPAs) and dismissal rates for transfer juniors and native juniors but they found significantly more native students graduated than transfers. They found that students who transferred after completing a full two-year program at the community college receive similar GPAs and have dismissal rates similar to native students.

Other studies have comparing the performance of transfer students to native four-year students at the first-year level, finding analogous results. Bohr, et al. (1994) found no significant difference in the intellectual development of incoming freshmen community college students when compared to incoming freshmen at a public four-year research university. The study compared test scores on the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) test which was administered at the beginning and end of the freshmen year.

Other studies have found significant differences in the measures of performance of two-year transfer students compared to native students. Several studies have investigated the performance of transfer students in their new institutions. Holahan, Green, and Kelley (1983) found that native students had a higher mean GPA than four-year transfer students and four-year transfer students had a higher mean GPA than two-year transfer students. A study by Sloan & Farrelly (as cited by Phillippi, 1990) reported that transfer students had a lower GPA

than native students. Phillippi (1990) examined the difference in performance and attitude of native students and transfer students at the time of graduation. He found that transfer students tend to be at a disadvantage compared to native students. Native students enter with higher mean ACT scores and exit with higher general education scores as measured with the ACT/COMP exam. Attitude measures were similar to performance measures. Phillippi found that native students rated their experiences at four-year institutions higher than transfer students rated their experiences.

Johnson (1987) examined persistence of 271 community college transfers at a senior college. She identified several factors that influenced persistence: perceptions of the value of education to future employment; integration, performance, and satisfaction with the academic program; and the transfer students' intent to continue their attendance. This study will limit its research to performance measures. GPAs were used because Townsend (1993) found that GPA was the best indicator of success of community college transfer students at senior colleges.

This study investigates the differences at graduation of transfers from a large urban community college in Mississippi, to native students at a large comprehensive university in southern Mississippi. Specifically, is there a difference in the grade point average of 1995 graduating native university students compared to 1995 graduates who transferred from the large community college? Is there a difference in the ACT score of 1995 graduating native students compared to 1995 graduates who transferred from the community college? Is there a difference in the 1995 graduating native students compared to the 1995 graduates who transferred from the community college in the college in which the students chose to major?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 710 of the 1994-95 bachelor's degree graduates from the large comprehensive university in southern Mississippi. For the purposes of this study, native students were defined as those who initially enroll in the university and have attended only that institution. Data analysis of the 1995 bachelor's degree students defined 573 as native students and 137 as community college transfer students. The community college in this study is one of the primary transfer student feeders of the university. 15% of the university's new admissions from Mississippi two-year colleges, transfer from the large urban community college chosen for this study.

Measures

Achievement measures of cumulative grade point average (GPA) and ACT scores were taken from the university's records for each graduating student. The college from which students graduated was also acquired. Colleges were used as an indication of academic major. The university has six colleges: the College of Fine Arts, the College of Business Administration, the College of Education and Psychology, the College of Health and Human Sciences, the College of Liberal Arts, and the College of Science and Technology.

Procedure

Unidentified subjects were taken from the degrees granted files for the academic year 1994-1995. Each record contained a unique record number, an admission code, a GPA score, an ACT score, the student's major and the student's college. The information was transferred to SPSS-PC. The native student group was compared to the large urban community college

group with t-tests, cross tabulations and Pearson's chi-square.

Results

T-tests were performed to compare the groups on ACT scores and grade point average. Statistical significance was detected in the comparison of native students to the community college transfer students based on ACT ($t_{662} = 3.79, p = .000$). Native students ($\bar{x} = 21.51$) tended to have higher ACT scores than the community college transfer students ($\bar{x} = 19.86$). There was no statistically significant difference in the grade point averages of native students ($\bar{x} = 3.08$) compared to community college transfer students ($\bar{x} = 3.01$).

Cross tabulations and Pearson chi-square were used to compare the two groups regarding the college from which the students chose to major. More community college transfer students enrolled and graduated from the College of Education and Psychology and the College of Health and Human Sciences than were expected with cross tabulation calculations ($\chi^2 = 14.10, df = 5, p = .015$). The complete cross tabulation table is included in the Appendix.

Discussion & Conclusions

When the community college students transfer to the university they have not scored as well on their ACT as native students. However, the lack of significance in the GPAs of graduates suggests that, at graduation from the university, the community college transfer students perform as well as native students. Best and Gehring (1983) reported similar results in transfer junior and native junior GPA scores. The GPA results reported by Holahan, Green and Kelley (1983) and Phillippi (1990) are not supported by this research. Phillippi (1990) did report a significant ACT difference similar to the results found in this study.

It should be noted that the GPAs used in this study are for grades obtained at the university only. Grades from first year students through senior years are used to acquire native student's GPAs. Only those grades received at the university are used to calculate transfer GPAs. The difference in the number and class level of grades used to calculate GPAs could affect results. Further studies are indicated to determine if this difference is significant. This study does not investigate if the rate of graduation of community college transfers differs from native students and further research is warranted.

Transfer students tend to major in education and health related fields more so than in liberal arts, fine arts, business and science. Further studies are indicated to determine if the students chose these fields because their lower ACT scores limited their ability to obtain admission to certain programs such as business or science. Other reasons such as ease of job acquisition or limited exposure to careers in liberal arts, fine arts, or science should also be explored.

At this point it should be noted that this is a single institution study and the results therefore are not generalizable beyond this institution. The specific community college chosen for this study is not necessarily representative of other community college transfers at this university. Further research is needed to explore this area.

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Appendix

College Code Cross tabulation				
College		Native Students	Transfer Students	Total
Business Administration	Count	95	17	112
	Expected count	90.4	21.6	112.0
	Std. Residual	.5	-1.0	
Education and Psychology	Count	96	27	123
	Expected count	99.3	23.7	123.0
	Std. Residual	-.3	.7	
Health and Human Sciences	Count	101	41	142
	Expected count	114.6	27.4	142.0
	Std. Residual	-1.3	2.6	
Liberal Arts	Count	156	32	188
	Expected count	151.7	36.3	188.0
	Std. Residual	.3	-.7	
Science and Technology	Count	96	17	113
	Expected count	91.2	21.8	113.0
	Std. Residual	.5	-1.0	
The Arts	Count	29	3	32
	Expected count	25.8	6.2	32.0
	Std. Residual	6	-1.3	
Total	Count	573	137	710
	Expected Count	573.0	137.0	710.0